



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**MAYOR ANNOUNCES IMPROVEMENTS ON OUR
BEACHES**

First Year Accomplishments Reduce Beach Postings

San Diego -- April 18, 2002 - A welcomed change is taking place in San Diego. What was a "civic embarrassment" a year ago is beginning to dissipate today. Through the concentrated efforts of the City's Storm Water Pollution Prevention Program (SWPPP) there was a substantial reduction in the number of days that City beaches were either posted with warning advisories or closed.

In 2000, there were 1957 beach posting days. For the year 2001, beach posting days had been reduced to 1247, an improvement of 36%. As a result, the City is making significant progress in accomplishing Mayor Murphy's Goal # 4, which is to clean up our beaches and bays.

The most dramatic change has occurred at three Mission Bay area beaches – Dog Beach, the Mission Bay Visitor Center and Bahia Point. For years, these beaches have been frequently listed in local beach advisory reports as having bacteria levels that exceed health standards. But through the focused efforts of the Storm Water Pollution Prevention Program postings at Dog Beach dropped from 125 days in 2000 to 70 days in 2001. The beach at the Visitor Center saw 207 posted days in 2000 drop to 72 in 2001 and postings at Bahia Point dropped dramatically from 129 days in 2000, to just seven (7) days last year!

"These results demonstrate that the City of San Diego can and will improve water quality at our beaches and bays," Mayor Dick Murphy said. "I am encouraged by our progress in cleaning up Mission Bay."

A major contributor to water pollution is the fact that when it rains or whenever water flows off our yards or over pavement, it flows directly into storm drains. Many people mistakenly believe this water gets "cleaned" before reaching waterways. But the sewer system and the storm water system (drains, inlets and catch basins) are not connected. Sewer water gets treated, but everything that washes into a storm drain goes untreated, directly into our rivers, creeks, bays and ocean. It is this "urban runoff" that causes most of our beach closures and postings due to contamination.

"Our strategy is to focus on our problem areas and implement actions that make immediate improvements to water quality," said Karen Henry, Deputy Director of the Storm Water Pollution Prevent Program. Henry adds, "Further improvements require more public education and scientific studies."

In November, the "Think Blue" education campaign (www.Thinkbluesd.org), was kicked off with the debut of four public service announcements that have aired on local television and radio station. The bi-lingual ad campaign provides key storm water pollution prevention information and behaviors that residents, businesses and industries can adopt to help improve the water quality of San Diego's beaches and bays.

“The City recognizes that urban runoff is an enormous problem,” said Councilmember Scott Peters, who co-chairs the City’s Clean Water Task Force. “We realize that in order to change behaviors we must first educate people. The “Think Blue” campaign provides this education.”

Recently, the City adopted the Urban Runoff Management Plan and hired six code compliance officers to enforce the City’s Storm Water Ordinance. Over the past six months, they have responded to more than 500 reports of illegal discharges and initiated hundreds of enforcement actions. Penalties and fines range from \$100 to \$10,000 per day, depending upon the severity of the infraction. Residents may now call a new storm water hotline number at (619) 235-1000 to report illegal discharges.

The City was also awarded \$6.5 million in state funding for projects that will improve water quality in Mission Bay and Ocean Beach via the San Diego River.

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